

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 130

May 22, 1996, 12:22 p.m.
Page S-5475 Temp. Record

BUDGET RESOLUTION/Medicare Recipients May Not Choose Balance Billing

SUBJECT: Senate Concurrent Budget Resolution for fiscal years 1997-2002 . . . S. Con. Res. 57. Domenici motion to table the Kennedy amendment No. 3997.

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE FAILED, 49-51

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. Con. Res. 57, the Concurrent Budget Resolution for fiscal years 1997-2002, will balance the Federal budget in fiscal year (FY) 2002 by slowing the overall rate of growth in spending over the next 6 years to below the rate of growth in revenue collections. The rate of growth in entitlements such as Medicare, Medicaid, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, and the Earned Income Credit will be slowed. No changes will be made to the Social Security program, the spending for which will grow from \$348 billion in FY 1996 to \$467 billion in FY 2002. Defense spending will be essentially frozen at its present level.

The Kennedy amendment would express the sense of Congress that any reconciliation bill considered this session should not give Medicare recipients the option of selecting an alternative Medicare plan that uses balance billing instead of continuing coverage under the conventional Medicare plan. ("Balance billing" refers to billing the Medicare recipient for that portion of a medical bill that is not covered by Medicare. Under the conventional Medicare plan, balance billing is not permitted--a health care provider has the choice of either accepting the Government's determination of the appropriate amount to pay, or of refusing to accept Medicare patients. Alternative Medicare plans, if they were allowed to be offered, would increase the out-of-pocket costs for traditional Medicare services for those senior citizens who elected to participate, but they would also provide coverage for items not currently covered by Medicare, such as dental care, eyeglasses, and prescription drugs.) The Kennedy amendment would also express the sense of Congress that balance billing will continue to be banned under the conventional Medicare program.

Following debate on the Kennedy amendment, Senator Domenici moved to table it. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment.

NOTE: Following the failure of the motion to table, the Kennedy amendment was adopted by voice vote.

(See other side)

YEAS (49)		NAYS (51)		NOT VOTING (0)	
Republicans (49 or 92%)	Democrats (0 or 0%)	Republicans (4 or 8%)	Democrats (47 or 100%)	Republicans (0)	Democrats (0)
Abraham	Helms	Chafee	Akaka	Inouye	
Ashcroft	Hutchison	Cohen	Baucus	Johnston	
Bennett	Inhofe	Jeffords	Biden	Kennedy	
Bond	Kassebaum	Snowe	Bingaman	Kerrey	
Brown	Kempthorne		Boxer	Kerry	
Burns	Kyl		Bradley	Kohl	
Campbell	Lott		Breaux	Lautenberg	
Coats	Lugar		Bryan	Leahy	
Cochran	Mack		Bumpers	Levin	
Coverdell	McCain		Byrd	Lieberman	
Craig	McConnell		Conrad	Mikulski	
D'Amato	Murkowski		Daschle	Moseley-Braun	
DeWine	Nickles		Dodd	Moynihan	
Dole	Pressler		Dorgan	Murray	
Domenici	Roth		Exon	Nunn	
Faircloth	Santorum		Feingold	Pell	
Frist	Shelby		Feinstein	Pryor	
Gorton	Simpson		Ford	Reid	
Gramm	Smith		Glenn	Robb	
Grams	Specter		Graham	Rockefeller	
Grassley	Stevens		Harkin	Sarbanes	
Gregg	Thomas		Heflin	Simon	
Hatch	Thompson		Hollings	Wellstone	
Hatfield	Thurmond			Wyden	
	Warner				

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

1—Official Business
2—Necessarily Absent
3—Illness
4—Other

SYMBOLS:

AY—Announced Yea
AN—Announced Nay
PY—Paired Yea
PN—Paired Nay

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

Last year's reconciliation bill maintained the current law prohibition on balance billing for traditional, fee-for-service Medicare, but it also allowed the creation of Medicare Choice plans, which could use balance billing. Any Medicare recipient could have either stayed in the traditional plan without any change at all, or could have selected one of the new Medicare Choice plans for health care coverage. For many senior citizens we think such plans would have proven attractive, because they would have covered such services as dental care and prescription drug coverage that are not paid for under the traditional Medicare program.

We still think that it is a good idea to give senior citizens this option. The supporters of the Kennedy amendment, though, disagree. They have offered this amendment to deny America's elderly the right to choose the type of health care coverage that they want. Our colleagues do not care if some senior citizens may want to pay a little extra for traditional services in return for getting a much broader range of health care services. Our colleagues believe that they, not the senior citizens themselves, should decide what type of health care plan they may have. Our colleagues are wrong, and their amendment should be tabled.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

Current law does not allow double, or balance, billing. When a Medicare recipient receives medical services, the bill goes only to the Federal Government. The doctor is not allowed to charge both the patient and the Government. Last year our Republican colleagues tried to change that arrangement. They wanted to create additional Medicare health plan options that would emulate many of the options that are now found in the private sector, and they wanted it to be possible for those new health plan options to use balance billing. We had no objection to the new options, but we strongly objected to the idea of allowing balance billing. Medicare recipients, no matter how they receive medical services, should not be charged for those services. We were unwilling to support balance billing last year, and we are unwilling to support it this year. We have therefore offered the Kennedy amendment, to express the sense of the Senate that this resolution does not assume any changes to Medicare that will allow balance billing. We urge our colleagues to join us in opposing the motion to table this amendment.